New Use of the Subjunctive

By CATHERINE BURGESS

Margaret White was tired of commuting, tired of the daily ride on the elevated road from Christopher street to One Hundred and Twenty-fifth street, very tired of the crowded class room at the end of it, so it is not strange that her mind, idle through design and strenuous through habit, picked out the broad shouldered young man who strode into the car at Forty-second and off again at One Hundred and Sixteenth street regularly as the morning came as a pleasant enough plaything.

Not that he was particularly good looking. He was distinguished only by a general purposefulness, eyes that looked neither to the right nor to the left, but buried themselves in the morning paper; a general air of being alone and liking it, which appealed to her state of being alone and not liking it.

Lately, instead of the newspaper, he had each morning drawn a book from his pocket and immediately become absorbed in it. It was not altogether a pleasant book, to judge from his face, which betrayed at times great irritation of spirit. Its covers were protected by a paper slip, calculated to balk the curiosity of whomsoever it might not concern. Margaret undoubtedly fell within this category, but that did not occur to her. An intentional device to arouse her curiosity could not have succeeded better.

One morning it chanced that the side of the car he always took was occupied by Italian laborers, dirty and malodorous. With hardly a glance at them and none at her, the man dropped into the seat at Margaret's side and produced his book. Alas! A side glance at it revealed only a Spanish grammar! Margaret could not have told what she had expected, but the unromantic fact suddenly let the whole affair down to the level of every day. The world again seemed cut out of one dingy piece, and all its uses flat, stale and unprofitable.

HE GUIDED HER TOWARD A COMPARATIVELY QUIET STREET.

Then habit asserted itself; the instinct of the teacher triumphed; in the student she forgot the man. His brow was knit as he searched the pages for something he apparently could not find. At last, oblivious to his surroundings, he muttered with emphasis, "Oh, hang!" The sound of his own voice recalled him. He glanced around guiltily. The Italians were stolidly unconscious of his existence, but he flushed as he met Margaret White's friendly gaze.

"Let me help you," she said softly.

Then hastily flushing in her turn at the wonder in his eyes, "I—I am a teacher, you see—and you seemed in difficulty."

His face cleared. Of course that explained everything. He answered frankly:

"I am. It's the subjunctive mood. I thought I was doing a fine thing when I got a native Spanish teacher, but he doesn't know much more English than I do Spanish, and between us heaven knows what tongue I am acquiring."

"I know; I've been through it," she assured him, smiling. "But tell me what puzzles you."

"As I said, the subjunctive. It's really the—the"—

"Exactly," she assented quickly. "It really is."

At One Hundred and Sixteenth street he shut the book with a triumphant snap.

"I'm getting hold of it," he announced. "I say, do you come up on this train often?"

"Every morning."

"Then"— But the train was already starting again. He had just time to dash to the platform and bow to Margaret at her window before it was gone. His smile, as he stood bareheaded in her last glimpse of him, completed the broken sentence.

Commuting lost its terrors after that. Many things may be said in twenty minutes, and, though Margaret conscientiously held her pupil to questions of syntax, she learned a good deal about him in spite of herself—that his name, for instance, was Harold Bond; that he was in the employ of a firm of piano manufacturers; that they were extending their business into Cuba and South America, and that he had the chance to represent them there if he could acquire a working knowledge of the language within two months.

She did not inquire when the two months would be up. She was not sure that she cared to know. Early in their friendship he had asked permission to visit her in her home, but she had replied that it would be embarrassing to introduce so irregular an acquaintance to the relatives with whom she lived, and he had not insisted. Perhaps she was a little disappointed that he had not.

One morning in June he squared his shoulders defiantly toward One Hundred and Sixteenth street and met her surprised glance with a look of decision.

"I am going on with you," he declared, "and I am going to walk over to school with you, and tonight I shall wait for you at the visitors' entrance and go home with you."

"Have I nothing to say about it?" she inquired.

"Certainly. You will say, 'I shall be very glad, indeed, my dear friend, to see you this afternoon and have an opportunity of presenting you to my family.'"

"And if I don't choose to say that?"

"Then I will introduce myself."

She was silent. For the first time her heart misgave her. What had been a pleasant adventure, something to brighten day dreams and think of vaguely between sleeping and waking, was turning into urgent reality.

At the foot of the elevated stairs he guided her toward a comparatively quiet street.

"I shall be late," she murmured, but obeyed.

"It doesn't matter," he replied. "Margaret, I have a confession to make. The first time we spoke to each other I asked you if you came up often by this route. I knew it without asking. I knew it before you ever noticed me—long before the days of the subjunctive mood. I followed you up here. I followed you to school. I held up a boy outside and found out who you were and what you taught, and then I bought a Spanish grammar. Margaret, sweetheart, forgive me"—for she had grown very pale. "I love you; I loved you then. I hated to do it, but we had no common friends, as people have in books. No accident ever happened in which I could rescue you. I couldn't speak to you first. I just had to depend upon your professional spirit and the subjunctive mood. Say you forgive me."

"And Cuba and your position and the rest of it?" she gasped.

"True as gospel," he answered. "Cuba is simply holding its breath till it can get our pianos. My 'position' is that of junior partner in the firm, and I am really going there—on my wedding trip, unless you would rather go somewhere else." Then pleadingly, "You wouldn't, would you?"

And Margaret surprised herself by whispering, "No." Afterward she reflected it was what she had meant to say all along.

Beef Tea.

This story was told by an old physician who had practiced for nearly fifty years in a small country town. One day he was summoned to a farmhouse, where he found a woman in a high fever and evidently exceedingly ill. He said to her husband, who was the only other person in the house:

"Your wife is very sick and must have nothing to eat except milk and beef tea, but I want you to give her a cup of one or the other every two hours." When he came the next morning and asked about his patient her husband said:

"That beef tea don't agree with her, doctor; it certainly don't. She began to feel bad as soon as she took it."

"That's odd," said the doctor. "You didn't give her any little bits of the meat in it, did you?"

"No, sir; I strained it first on account of the grounds."

"Grounds!" roared the doctor. "What did you make that beef tea out of?"

"Corn beef and the best green tea. I boiled 'em together all yesterday afternoon to get the strength out. But it don't agree with her, doctor; it certainly don't."

Your Watch Is a Compass.

"Most men who own a good watch," said a jeweler, "think they know all about it. They have the number fixed in their memory in case it is stolen. They could probably pick it out from fifty other watches with their eyes shut. But how many men know that their watch is a compass and will tell north from south as accurately as it will tell the time of day? Stanley, the explorer, did not know it until he had groped his way through the dark continent and met a Belgian sailor on the coast. Every watch is a compass. If you point the hour hand to the sun, the south is exactly halfway between the hour and the figure XII on the dial. Suppose, for instance, it is 4 o'clock. Point the hand indicating 4 to the sun and II on the watch is exactly south. If it is 8 o'clock, point the hand indicating 8 to the sun and the figure X on the dial is due south. No man need get lost if he carries a watch."

Snow Blindness In Tibet.

To prevent snow blindness the natives of Tibet grease their faces and then blacken the skin all around their eyes with burnt sticks. Most foreigners when exposed to the snow in Tibet wear colored glasses. Douglas W. Freshfield tells of an experience in the mountains. "My party was overtaken at the height of 15,000 feet by a violent snowstorm. I had provided spectacles for all, but some had lost them. The Tibetans resorted to the primitive precaution; the Lepuchas wore veils with their long hair. They suffered more or less, but not severely and only for the first two days, while the myriad facets of the new fallen snow retained a peculiarly burning power. Though we afterward walked and camped on the snow for nearly two weeks, there were no further complaints."

His Nose.

There was once a gentleman who had had the misfortune to lose his nose. "My dear," said the lady of the house which he was about to visit to her little daughter, "I want you to be very particular and make no remarks about Mr. Jenkins' nose." The young lady promised. Later in full drawing room it was noticed that she looked surprised and even bewildered, and those who knew her best waited hopefully for some remark which would, so to speak, make the home bright and lively. At last it came. "Mamma," she said in a clear, resonant voice, "why did you tell me to say nothing about Mr. Jenkins' nose? He hasn't got any."

Only Art.

The studio "tea" had been a great success. The one small and very youthful member of the company had walked softly about, looking at the pictures. Just before the party broke up the artist discovered him surveying a picture of a lion with awe and interest.

"Don't be afraid, little chap," said the artist genially, patting his small guest on the head. "He won't hurt you."

"Oh, I'm not afraid at all," came the response in a clear treble that caused every one to listen. "He doesn't look a bit as if he were alive, you know."